

In American history, not every story is one of bravery, kindness, or generosity; sometimes the American story included “bad guys.” And the history of Muncie and Delaware County is no different, and sometimes what made a woman notable was something “bad.” And just like some of the men in history, some of the notable women on the list were not considered “bad” at the time. In one such instance in the story of Muncie, we have the character of Daisy Douglas Barr.



Born in 1875, Daisy Barr became an evangelist at the age of 16 and was ordained as a Quaker minister in 1896 in nearby New Castle and Muncie. In this role, Barr was a popular speaker in the temperance movement against the evils of alcohol, and her influence helped the city of Muncie to go “dry” in 1914, before Prohibition. Her views regarding alcohol crossed over into political issues: She saw women’s dependence on men as one of the key problems with alcohol abuse. So Barr also preached in support of women’s right to vote.

By the early 1920s, Barr emerged as a political and religious leader and was the first woman vice-chair of the Indiana Republican Party. She helped found the Muncie YWCA with Frank Ball and served as one of its directors. She was president of the War Mothers, and there were even plans to name a hospital after her. But in 1923, Barr resigned from the Republican leadership when it became public that she was an active member of the Ku Klux Klan.

However, membership in the Klan in Indiana at that time was not altogether negative (Membership at that time was estimated to be anywhere from 125,000 to 500,000 men). Indiana Klan Grand Dragon D.C. Stephenson (who would later be convicted of rape and murder) hand-picked Daisy Barr to lead a women’s order of the Klan called the Queens of the Golden Mask.

Barr would be the Imperial Empress. She attracted thousands to rallies and recruited over 75,000 women from Ohio and Indiana to the group. At a rally in Rushville in 1923, Barr addressed a crowd of over 20,000 people, and the Muncie Klan Band was a featured attraction. Her speech focused on white supremacy.

Stephenson arranged for Daisy Barr to be paid for each Klan member she recruited, but Barr also set up a scheme to supply all of the robes to the Klan members she recruited. And she was actually profiting off of the sale of the robes, making hundreds of thousands of dollars in a short time.

Numerous factors, including Stephenson’s murder conviction, led to the decline of the Klan in Indiana; Barr was sued by a rival Klan leader and semi-retired. Daisy Douglas Barr was killed in a head-on collision in southern Indiana in 1938.